

Antoine Love

Ed 424

Final Take Home

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1) How will you prepare for and ensure that the inclusion of students with special needs is a successful venture in the future classroom?

When I encounter my first student who has special needs in my areas of Mathematics and/or Physics I will utilize the following strategies to aid in my classes. Like with every student making an appointment to meet the parents is important. This brings the education of the student to the home and allows the parents an entry into their child's education. Meeting the parents will also allow you to inform the parents of how you will measure their child's progress according to his/her IEP. It would also be prudent to give the parents tips, or get tips from them, on what works and what does not in the education of their child.

Meeting the SpEd teachers and para-educators is important too. These are the people that spend a lot of time educating students with special needs. Thus, they know techniques and strategies I could use in order to be successful in teaching the students with special needs in my classroom. They have also most likely spent a lot of time working with these students. So they may know what motivates them and what sinks the motivation boat. These educators can be a great source of information when it comes to educating the students with special needs.

If the students with special needs have IEPs then that will also be a source of information. Inside the IEP I will look for the student's Present Level of Performance (PLOP) in my subject areas. That way I will not expect things from the students they do not know or cannot do yet.

This will help in my teaching so that I can effectively teach in their proximal zone of development.

The IEP will also describe testing accommodations that I should allow for the students with special needs. I will make sure to abide by all of the accommodations. Also, ensuring that the students are in as friendly and comfortable environment as possible will hopefully reduce as much anxiety as possible. While that does not necessarily imply they will do well on the test it will hopefully prevent aversions toward tests.

There are a few other things on the IEP that will aid in my teaching and they are the measurable goals, how much and when participation will occur in the general education classroom (in this scenario they will most of the time for the purposes of this question), and exactly how progress will be measured. Keeping the goals in plain sight will help keep the direction of the education in line and may even help with the motivation of the student. How you will measure the progress made towards those goals is also important in the progression of the education of the student. Lastly, when and for how long you will have the students in the classroom will be stated in the IEP which will give me timeframes for teaching things necessary for the goals in the student's IEP.

2a) How will you use differentiation in your classroom to make sure all students are successful and able to reach their full potential, including students who are gifted, have IEPs, are ELLs, or who are at-risk?

Throughout the course of this semester education began to take on a different face. I began this semester with traditional education in my mind as the way teaching is supposed to be. But now, after this class my view of what education is and should be includes differentiation in every aspect of teaching. Traditional education seems to have been replaced by a differentiated

education, so much so, that when I read what differentiated education is - including a warm and safe environment within the classroom, positive group activities, ever-changing strategies of teaching, and multiple angles from which subjects are taught - I think, “isn’t that how everyone teaches?” The fact is that not all teaching follows such a differentiated schema and the following paragraphs include ways I will create and use differentiation in my classroom.

First and foremost I think it is important to create an environment where students feel safe and are encouraged to take healthy risks such as answering questions in class, expressing opinions when asked in class, or even be ok with making mistakes. Because I don’t have my own class and I won’t for at least another eight nine months I cannot know for sure, but I think this will lead to student involvement and motivation.

Before any teaching actually begins, in order to use various strategies for teaching from several angles, it would be necessary to figure out which strategies and angles would be the most efficient. This means that I will need to create some pre-assessment material that gathers up information on student interests, existing knowledge in the subject, and preferred learning methods.

After the safe environment grid work is laid down and the pre-assessment is complete I will work towards using ever-changing strategies of teaching by utilizing individual and group work in the classroom. Lecture in the classroom must take place to some extent whether it is in large group, small group mini-lessons, or individual tutoring. How that occurs can be differentiated according to student learning preferences. Some students may prefer large group instruction through PowerPoint, others through taking notes from the chalk board, and yet others in a more informal tutoring session where the teacher and student converse about questions the student has after reading about a subject in the area of study. After the lecture is complete,

students will be allowed to enter into individual or group work. Figuring things out on their own in small groups or even individually may be another way students can collect information about the subject at hand. This may even work in place of lecture as a form of inquiry lesson where students are guided through a series of steps that leads to a big idea from the subject. Allowing the students with high abilities to inspect tougher material and the students with special needs to work at their own pace with sufficient teacher or para help can also help differentiate in this process.

After students have existing knowledge on a subject the students should see it again and learn new things about it from another angle or perspective. One way I can do this is to have the students research the topic and how it relates to their interests. I could do a little searching beforehand to make sure the subject is worthy of such an inquiry. If not, I may be able to have the students apply their knowledge on the subject to their interests in an original manor. In fact, giving the students an option to do both would allow them to increase the ownership of their learning while giving them a new angle on the old material.

Finally, how the students show me they comprehend the information given to them during the lesson is important in differentiation too. Giving the students multiple choices such as writing a paper on the subject, applying the subject to a different area of study such as using mathematics in physics, or even give a presentation of their own on an interesting thing from the subject. Creating options that allow for a greater or lesser complexity of final product is a good way to differentiate for students with high abilities or special needs. Any one of the final products allows the student to have some choice when it comes to expressing what they have learned.

Creating a differentiated classroom will take a lot of time, preparation, and practice, but it is one step closer to the goal of an individualized education that is appropriate with regards to student aptitude. I believe that everything stated in the previous paragraphs is necessary and helpful in differentiating my future classrooms and I look forward to doing so.

3) What part of The Ron Clark Movie will you take with you? Explain to me the most important thing you learned or discovered through the film, or the message you believe it is sending.

The part of The Ron Clark movie that I will take with me is when Mr. Clark decided to move to New York City. Teaching is full of opportunities like that; opportunities that open up a world of adventure and hardship that, hopefully, end in good results for all parties involved. Out of love for his job and love for his students Mr. Clark took on that adventure. He was not content to help those students who needed it the least. Instead, he was driven to help the students that needed it the most and chose to move to New York to do so. I think that was the true adventure Mr. Clark was undertaking. Taking that first step and taking a chance led to some extreme growth.

Aside from the fact Mr. Clark worked so hard that he became ill from pneumonia he learned what worked and what did not in educating students from a different background. Because of that he became an even better teacher than the car-spot-winning one. None of this would have been possible if he would not have started on his adventure. To borrow from a well known phrase, every journey begins with one step.

This is especially important to me because I hope to be going on a journey in the near future too. I recently applied to student teach in Shanghai and I also had a meeting with representatives from Asian Lutheran Education Association and LCMS World Missions. While

the students I will teach may not be as difficult as the students in The Ron Clark Movie, the students will certainly be just as diverse. If I were to get a student teaching or teaching position in Asia I hope that I would come away with an experience similar to Mr. Clark's.